



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT NRCS ALASKA



This year we transitioned to the Biden-Harris Administration amid the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. NRCS staff and our partners continued to work with private landowners to proactively address natural resource concerns while following health and safety protocols. We are focusing on equity and inclusion; climate-smart agriculture; and urban agriculture which are USDA's priorities.

We successfully invested \$7.7 million directly to Alaska landowners to support conservation projects through our flagship program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). We are pleased to report that 81 percent of our EQIP funding this year went to Alaska Native producers. As the largest private landowners in the state, Alaska Natives are critical partners in getting NRCS conservation projects on-the-ground and making a difference on the landscape.

We also increased participation in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) by 400% compared to last year. CSP rewards landowners for the conservation work they have already been doing and offers exciting opportunities to adopt new conservation activities on their land.

Partners in the Copper River Watershed received competitive funding for a new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project that will improve salmon habitat.

There are many more accomplishments summarized in this report. All of them would not be possible without the tireless efforts of Alaska's private landowners, NRCS staff and our many conservation partners. Thank you for the work you all do to make conservation happen in Alaska.

— Alan D. McBee

State Conservationist

## Financial Assistance

### EQIP

Environmental Quality  
Incentives Program



**126** applications

**73** contracts

**56,520** acres

**\$7.7** million obligated

### CSP

Conservation Stewardship Program

**14** applications

**12** contracts

**36,529** acres

**\$416K** obligated

# Assistance to Historically Underserved Producers

Includes all landowners who are socially disadvantaged, veteran, limited resource, and beginning farmer/ranchers. Also includes Alaska Native producers.

## FY21 EQIP

Environmental Quality Incentives Program - Historically Underserved

**56** contracts

**55,086** acres

**\$6.8** million

**89%** of all EQIP funding went to HU producers

**81%** of all EQIP funding went to Alaska Native producers

## FY21 CSP

Conservation Stewardship Program - Historically Underserved

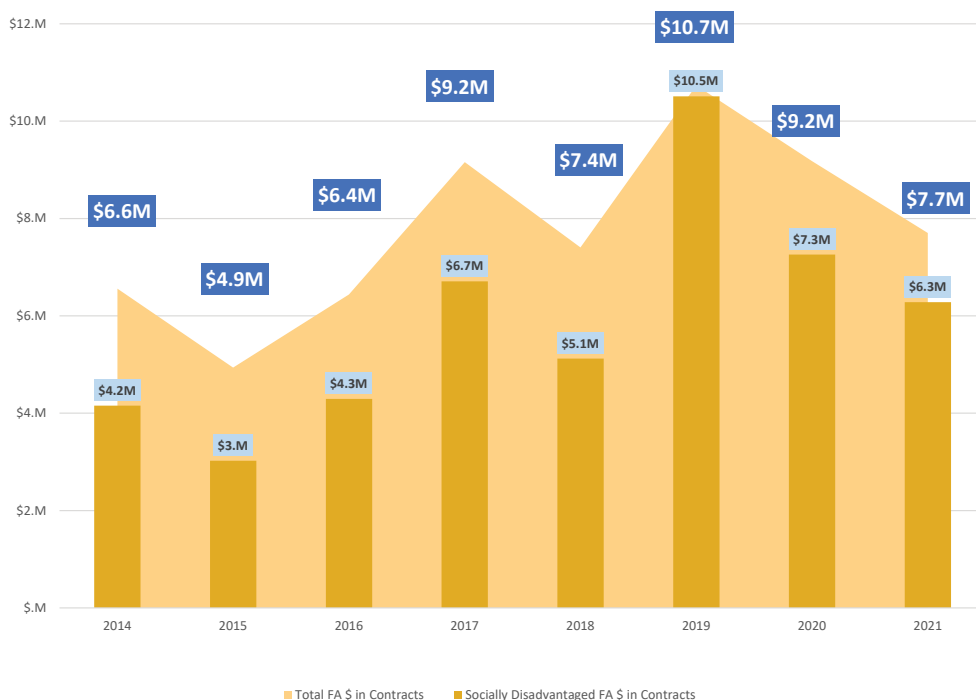
**7** contracts

**36,490** acres

**\$330,461**

**85%** of all CSP funding went to HU producers

## EQIP Dollars in Alaska From 2014 - 2021 to Socially Disadvantaged Producers



## Historically Underserved Producer Groups

### Socially Disadvantaged

Member of a socially disadvantaged group that has been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Includes American Indians or Alaska Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders and Hispanics.

### Beginning Farmer/Rancher

Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years, and who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

### Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher

A producer with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years, and who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.

### Veteran Farmer/Rancher

Served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve component thereof and was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable; and has not operated a farm or ranch, or has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 years; or who first obtained status as a veteran during the most recent 10-year period.



## Preserving Farmland for Future Generations



This year NRCS finalized a conservation easement that will protect 96 acres of working agricultural lands at Moffitt Farm in Palmer, Alaska. The easement was completed in partnership with the Alaska Farmland Trust and the Moffitt Family, with financial assistance provided by NRCS's Agricultural Lands Easement Program - Agricultural Lands Easement (ACEP-ALE). The easement will keep this farmland in agriculture forever.

## Conservation Easements

### ACEP

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

**1** easement

**96** acres

**\$794,200**

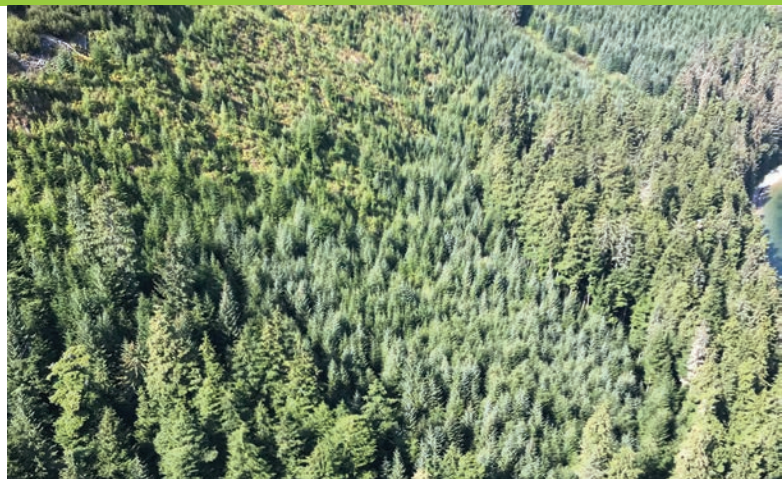
## Top 10 Conservation Practices

### By Dollars Obligated

1. **\$2.4M** - Tree/Shrub Establishment
2. **\$1.8M** - Forest Stand Improvement
3. **\$833K** - Trails and Walkways
4. **\$649K** - Aquatic Organism Passage
5. **\$391K** - High Tunnel System
6. **\$291K** - Fence
7. **\$154K** - Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
8. **\$124K** - Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment
9. **\$121K** - Cover Crop
10. **\$112K** - Pasture and Hay Planting

### By Practice Count

1. **118** - Nutrient Management
2. **63** - Conservation Crop Rotation
3. **49** - Structures for Wildlife
4. **47** - Tree/Shrub Establishment
5. **46** - High Tunnel System
6. **40** - Irrigation Water Management
7. **32** - Forest Stand Improvement
8. **21** - Fence
9. **19** - Cover Crop
10. **18** - Irrigation System, Microirrigation



**Forest Stand Improvement** was completed on 7,100+ acres of Alaska Native Corporation-owned land in southeast Alaska in FY2021. Seen from a helicopter, this image from Prince of Wales Island shows unharvested mature forests (at right and in the lower left foreground) juxtaposed with unmanaged young growth (dense stands in the center foreground and far upper right) and thinned young growth (center-left). The spacing between trees in thinned stands allows for sunlight to reach understory plants such as blueberry, which provide critical winter forage for deer as well as food for rural Alaska residents.

# Regional Conservation Partnership Program

## RCPP

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

**1** new project

**\$3.8** million NRCS Investment over 5 years

**\$4.2** million partner investments over 5 years

## New project in Copper Basin Watershed to improve salmon habitat and reduce flood risk

This year a new project in Alaska was funded through the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The Copper River Watershed Project received \$3.8 million from NRCS, with partners contributing an additional \$4.2 million.

The five-year project will restore access to an estimated 187.5 miles of streams and 527 acres of lake habitat to sockeye, Chinook and coho salmon, providing significant benefits to subsistence, sport and commercial fisheries. The project will also reduce the likelihood of severe property damage during extreme flood events, making the watershed more flood resilient and improving the structural integrity of roads and infrastructure.

The work primarily involves removing undersized culverts and replacing them with stream-smart culverts that allow fish and other aquatic species to safely pass; and planting trees and shrubs along stream banks to reduce erosion, enhance biodiversity

and improve aquatic habitat. The new stream-smart culvert designs allow debris to pass freely, require almost no maintenance, and have a longer lifespan. The improved stream crossings will ensure the stability of Copper Basin road networks which are critical to the productivity of local rural economies.

Project partners include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Ahtna Inc.
- Chugach Alaska Corporation
- Eyak Corporation
- Native Village of Kluti-Kaah
- Native Village of Eyak
- Alyeska Pipeline Service Co.



Replacing two undersized culverts with a double-lane bridge on the Little Tonsina River is the highest priority fish passage restoration project in the watershed. These culverts are a partial barrier to coho and Chinook salmon and can limit access to an estimated 70 miles of upstream spawning and rearing habitat.



A stream smart culvert replaces an undersized culvert (foreground) on the Copper River Delta improving habitat quality and fish passage for Coho Salmon, Dolly Varden, and other aquatic organisms.



## RCPP Projects in Alaska by Fiscal Year Awarded

Project Name	Lead Partner	Fiscal Year Awarded	Fiscal Year Expiration	Partner Contributions	NRCS Contributions
Restoring Fish Habitat in Copper River Watershed	Copper River Watershed Project	2021	2026	\$4.2M	\$3.8M
Tanana River Watershed RCPP	The Conservation Fund	2020	2025	\$1.3M	\$1.3M
Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (Renewal)	Sealaska Corporation	2020	2025	\$1.8M	\$1.8M
Cooper Basin Subsistence Landscape Resiliency	Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission- CRITR	2018	2023	\$597K	\$1.7M
Keex' Kwaan' Community Forest Partnership	Sealaska Corporation	2018	2023	\$225K	\$2.1M
Implementing Education, Outreach, and Conservation Practices on Tribal Land for Socially Disadvantaged Producers	Tyonek Tribal Conservation District	2014	2021	\$1.8M	\$1.6M
Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (original)	Sealaska Corporation	2014	2021	\$540K	\$2.3M
<b>Total RCPP Investments in Alaska</b>				<b>\$10.4M</b>	<b>\$14.6M</b>

## Habitat Restoration on Prince of Wales Island

A public/private forestry project in Southeast Alaska was recently selected to receive nearly \$660,000 in federal funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership.

The Prince of Wales Landscape Restoration Partnership will restore habitat for wildlife and fisheries, stimulate the local economy, and maintain or enhance traditional use opportunities. The project spans jurisdictional boundaries across public and private lands to conserve species and improve aquatic and wildlife habitat on a landscape level.

This funding capitalizes on previous work that has been completed on Prince of Wales Island through Joint Chiefs' funding from 2017 to 2019. The first round of Joint Chiefs' funding allowed project partners to collect

extensive aerial LiDAR data for all of Prince of Wales Island; perform vegetation and stream surveys; collect deer DNA samples; complete forest stand improvement; improve stream road crossings for salmon; and more.

This new round of Joint Chiefs' funding will expand on existing efforts to include over 2,200 acres of forest and wildlife habitat improvement treatments on non-industrial private lands, state lands, and Forest Service managed lands, in multiple project areas across Prince of Wales Island and associated outer islands.



## Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership

**1** new project with the Tongass National Forest

**\$422K** NRCS Investment

**\$238K** Forest Service Investment

# FY2021 Project Spotlights

## Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry

Alaska is vulnerable to climate change as a result of our northern latitudes and historic cold conditions. Climate change creates multiple and diverse challenges and opportunities. NRCS works with private landowners to make agricultural lands more resilient to extreme weather events such as wildfire and drought.

One example is a 145-mile fuel break project with the Kenai Natives Association, located on the Kenai Peninsula. Fuel breaks reduce vegetative fuel loads which slows the spread of wildfire, therefore reducing the risk of catastrophic loss. They also allow safe access for firefighters to extinguish flames.

KNA is working with NRCS through our Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to create fuel breaks in strategic locations on their forestland. Chugachmiut is assisting this effort with technical planning and with in-house chainsaw crews to perform the work. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is also a partner in this project and similar projects are being performed on adjacent public lands.

## Reducing Wildfire Risk on the Kenai Peninsula



Staff with the Kenai Natives Association, Chugachmiut and NRCS walk along a fuel break on privately-owned forestland.

## Emergency Watershed Protection Program

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) is a recovery program aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms or other natural disasters.

In Alaska, Tribal governments are active sponsors for EWP projects, mainly projects that involve rapid soil erosion affecting riverbanks following the spring break up. EWP projects in Alaska include relocating homes threatened by erosion, stabilizing stream banks, removing debris and repairing levees.



**3 new EWP  
projects funded:**  
Tuntutuliak, AK  
Kwigillingok, AK  
McGrath, AK

**Investment:  
\$4.9 million**



## Improving Stream Habitat in Spasski Creek Watershed



Hoonah Indian Association crew members trap fish and remove them before construction begins on a stream habitat improvement project on Huna Totem land.

NRCS is helping the Huna Totem Corporation improve stream habitat in Spasski Creek watershed near the village of Hoonah in Southeast Alaska. Past logging practices removed large trees from the riparian area alongside a tributary to Spasski Creek, resulting in declining salmon habitat quality. Through the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, restoration opportunities were identified and designs for installation of coarse woody habitat were developed by the U.S. Forest Service's National Aquatics Center. Installation was funded through an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract with Huna Totem, the native village corporation for Hoonah; and work was completed by a local contractor. Additional habitat work was done by hand using a crew employed by the Hoonah Indian Association, the local Tribe. This restoration project is truly a collaborative effort!

## Protecting Nesting Bird Habitat in Hooper Bay

This year work was completed on phase three of a Trails and Walkways project in Hooper Bay, in partnership with Alaska Native private landowners, the Sea Lion Corporation. The corporation plans to continue working on the trail throughout the winter as materials and weather allow.

The trail protects nesting bird habitat by restricting four-wheeler traffic to a hardened trail; and it also helps to protect and sustain a subsistence way of

live for residents who traverse vast stretches of tundra via ATV to hunt and gather.

The Village of Hooper Bay has been successful in promoting the use of the trail with signage as well as educating local residents through community meetings. NRCS staff have noticed the growth of vegetation and stabilization of the tundra over the last few summers along with numerous species of birds nesting again.



Work continues on a large-scale Trails and Walkways project in the Village of Hooper Bay.



# Urban Agriculture

## Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Grants

### **Yakutat Tlingit Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Project**

Recipient: Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

Fiscal Year Awarded: 2021

Summary: Provide food scrap collection service and create compost with an in-vessel composter with capacity to process 1,100 pounds of food waste per week; and develop a distribution system for compost with education campaign.

### **Kenai Peninsula Borough Community Compost and Food Waste Recovery Program**

Recipient: Kenai Peninsula Borough

Fiscal Year Awarded: 2021

Summary: Partner with Kenai Local Food Connection to expand and model for replication the Community Compost project which solicited interested residents and businesses to segregate compostable food waste for pickup and delivery to a composting site.

### **Expanding on Success and Envisioning the Future of Organics Diversion in Anchorage**

Recipient: Municipality of Anchorage

Fiscal Year Awarded: 2020

Summary: Conduct feasibility study and implementation plan for a municipal-scale composting operation at the Anchorage Regional Landfill, including an education campaign.

## Growing Local Foods in Food Deserts



With conservation assistance from NRCS, Rosanna McInnes (right) and Callie Denham (left) created the first-ever Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) business in Seldovia, a remote village located off the road system. The community is only accessible by boat or plane, making its food system volatile.

USDA's focus on urban agriculture aims to increase access to healthy, affordable and fresh produce in or near metropolitan areas and in communities considered "food deserts." A food desert is an area where a substantial number of residents do not have easy access to a supermarket or a large grocery store.

Many of Alaska's communities both on and off the road system are food deserts. NRCS provides conservation assistance to private landowners to support local food production in food deserts. One way we do this is through the Seasonal High Tunnel Conservation Practice, which is part of EQIP. High tunnels provide a controlled environment that protect crops from cold temperatures and extend the growing season.



A community compost drop-off site in Anchorage ensures food scraps are kept separately and can be safely composted.



## Providing Natural Resources Data to the Public



Staff travel by helicopter to the Upper Spencer Bench snow course to manually measure mountain snowpack.

Alaska NRCS maintains 80 snow telemetry (SNOTEL) sites throughout Alaska that provide real-time weather data to measure the amount of mountain snowpack and water content stored in the snow pack. Additionally, there are roughly 200 snow courses / aerial markers across Alaska where data is manually collected. Data collected from the NRCS Snow Survey Program is critical in helping communities plan water supply management, flood control, climate modeling, recreation and conservation planning.

This year NRCS installed two new SNOTEL sites: Paradise Hill, located along the ALCAN highway about 20 miles from the border; and Creamers Field in Fairbanks. The crew successfully completed maintenance and improvement projects at multiple SNOTEL sites across the state.

## Snow Survey



NRCS staff installed a new Snow Telemetry (SNOTEL) site at Creamers Field in Fairbanks.

## Soil Survey

The NRCS Soil Survey program collects valuable soils data and makes it available to the public via Web Soil Survey. A soil survey is a resource inventory where field scientists collect, organize and interpret information about the natural resources in an area. Although the main focus is on soils, data is also collected on vegetation, landforms, and surface hydrology. Soil surveys help landowners and communities select the best sites for homes, schools, airfields, roads, landfills, and agriculture.

### FY21 Soil Survey Activities

- Nulato Hills - 1.56M acres
- North Copper - 141,740 acres
- Willow - 541,314 acres
- Chatham - Sitka - 100 acres
- White Mountains - 6.49M acres
- Cantwell - 345,830 acres